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ABSTRACT

This paper defines the grammatical role of a particle in Swahili in terms of the semantic information which it contributes to all utterances in which it occurs. The particle -A occurs in the syntactic configuration Noun 1 -A Noun 2 and has been traditionally described as reflecting relations of possession and attribution between the two nouns in construct. By identifying the meaning-carrying function of this particle in communication, it becomes possible to understand how speakers are able to employ a single linguistic form to convey a wide variety of messages. In explaining these possibilities, context is crucial. A premise of the paper is that the differences observed in the various contexts of -A enable speakers to communicate different messages with the single form. "Context" in this usage may be linguistic or non-linguistic. According to differences in context, the meaning of -A is manipulated to express what initially appears to be totally different relationships between the two nouns linked by -A. However, it is shown that the form has essentially one communicative value, meaning, and that the different messages result from inferences on the part of speakers and hearers alike about the precise nature of the message conveyed by -A in a given context. (Author/CLK)

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Nominal Possession in Swahili: Its Role in Communication

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1.0 Introduction

In this paper we intend to examine how the particle -A in Swahili, traditionally described as a possessive or associative particle, is used in communication. The discussion will be aimed at identifying the semantic role which -A plays in Swahili grammar; that is, what meaningful information, if any, does -A convey in the communication of messages? Through such an analysis, we may come to understand how it is possible for users of the language to express a wide variety of communicated messages with a single linguistic element.[1]

1.1 The data used in this inquiry was collected over a period of six months in Mombasa, Kenya; a town whose main population speaks Swahili as a first language.[2] As there are very few written works in this dialect, texts from more standardized varieties will be referred to as well. Given the impreciseness of the semantic information contributed by -A in communication, it is assumed that dialectal differences will not alter the nature of the central thesis to be presented here. Variations in contextual influences may indeed follow dialectal boundaries.

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[1]I would like to thank Robert Kirsner, Larry Hyman, Erica Garcia and Benji Wald for their comments and criticisms on various versions of this paper. Without their support, it would never have been completed; however, I take full responsibility for the ideas expressed and the manner in which they are presented.

[2]Special thanks belong to the family of Abu Suleiman Mazrui in Mombasa for their hospitality and patience; and to Huda, Bimunu, and Batuli for their continued help during working sessions. In addition, I would like to thank the family of Fahmy Hinawy for their hospitality, especially Bimomo.

2.0 Traditional Analyses

In Swahili, the following syntactic configuration is frequently found: $NOUN_1$ Pronominal $Concord_1$--A $NOUN_2$. In traditional grammars, -A has usually been glossed 'of' in English translation. The descriptions of this particle to be presented in detail are those found in two major works on Swahili: Swahili Language Handbook by E.C. Polomé(1967) and Swahili Grammar by E.O. Ashton(1944).

2.1 Ashton describes the morphological form -A in terms of two basic usage types: Possessive (p.55) and the -A of Relationship (p.145). In the possessive construction, $NOUN_1$ is the possessed nominal and $NOUN_2$ is the possessor:

(1) Mtoto w--a mwanamke — Literal: 'Child of woman'
Child woman — Gloss: 'The/A woman's child'

In its use as the -A of Relationship several construction types are noted:

a. -A+NOUN: Examples given in the text show that the noun of this construction may represent a variety of features:

(i) a feature attributed to the noun to which it is attached(N_1):

(2) Mtoto w--a furaha — Literal: 'Child of Happiness'
Child happiness — Gloss: 'The/A happy child'

(ii) a measured quantity of N_1:

(3) Kikombe cha kahawa — Literal: 'Cup of coffee'
Cup coffee — Gloss: 'Cup containing coffee' OR 'The/A coffee cup'

(iii) a portion of N_1:

(4) Kipande ch--a mkate — Literal: 'Piece of bread'
Piece bread

(iv) the material which N_1 is made out of:

(5) Kiti ch--a mti — Literal: 'Chair of tree'
Chair tree — Gloss: 'The/A wooden chair'

(v) the direction which N_1 is aimed at:

(6) A-li-m-piga kofi l--a shavu. (p.145) Lit: 'Blow of cheek'
He-pst-him-hit blow cheek Gl: 'He hit him a blow on the cheek'

(vi) information which N_1 concerns:

(7) Habari z--a serikali — Lit: 'News of government'
News government — Gl: 'News about the government' OR 'The government's news'/ 'News from the government'

b. -A+VERBAL INFINITIVE:

(8) Chakula ch--a ku-tosha
Food to-suffice
Lit: 'Food of to-suffice'
Gl: 'Sufficient food' OR 'Food to suffice'

(9) Sindano y--a ku-shon-e-a
Needle to-sew-with
Lit: 'Needle of to-sew-with'
Gl: 'Sewing needle' OR 'The/A needle to sew with'

(10) Uzi w--a ku-uz-w-a
Thread to-sell-passive
Lit: 'Thread of to-be-sold'
Gl: 'Thread for selling'

c. -A+CARDINAL NUMBER:

(11) Nyumba y--a tano
House five
Lit: 'House of five'
Gl: 'Fifth house'

d. -A+ADVERB:

(12) Mashamba y--a mbali
Farms distance
Lit: 'Farms of distance'
Gl: 'Distant farms'

(13) Nyimbo z--a kizungu
Songs foreign origin
Lit: 'Songs of foreign origin'
Gl: 'Foreign songs'

(14) Njia z--a mji-ni
Lit: 'Roads of town-in'
Gl: 'Town roads' OR 'Roads in town' (Roads which are in town)

2.2 Polomé describes -A as a 'connective particle' (p.132) and assigns to it the following uses:

a. Possession: As above (1)

b. Characterization: As (2)-(11)

c. With pronominal complements implying locative relations:

(15) Waalimu w--a pale
Teachers that place
Lit: 'Teachers of that place' (p.134)
Gl: 'Teachers of that region'

(16) Habari z--a kwetu
News our place
Lit: 'News of our place' (p.134)
Gl: 'Local news' OR 'News of/from home'

d. With invariable complements:

(17) Safari y--a mbali
Lit: 'Safari of distance' (cf.12)
Gl: 'Distant safari' OR 'Long safari'

2.3 The uses of -A extend further however:

(18) Ni-na zawadi y--a Hasan.
I-have gift Hasan
Lit: 'Gift of Hasan'
Gl: 'I have a gift for/to give to Hasan' OR 'I have Hasan's gift' (already somehow in his possession but its with me)

(19) A-li-andika barua y--a Hasan.
He-pst-write letter Hasan
Lit: 'Letter of Hasan'
Gl: 'He wrote a letter to give to/on behalf of Hasan.'

(20) Ni-li-pika chakula ch--a Hasan. Lit: 'Food of Hasan'
I-pst-cook food Hasan Gl: 'I cooked food for/ on behalf of Hasan'

2.4 Ashton's and Polomé's accounts reveal that the problem of understanding the role of -A in communication is more than one involving the identification of a set of categories which will accurately reflect all uses of -A. Apart from the fact that the boundaries of their categories differ in some ways, we can note that neither are able to deal with representing constructions which can convey more than one meaning when considered in isolation (indicated by OR glosses added by present author). Further, (all)the uses in 2.3 have not been mentioned by either grammar. It would seem then that the only possible exhaustive categorization of -A uses would be one which defined all contextual situations in which -A can occur, an infinite task. While 'benefactive' and 'dative' meanings as noted in 2.3 might be included as possible 'use' categories, we should note that the systems of categories thusfar postulated do not provide for the following meaningful distinctions:

(21) Maji y--a ku-nywa Lit: 'Water of to-drink'
Gl: 'Water to drink' COMPARE

(22) Maji y--a ku-nyw-ia Lit: 'Water of to-drink-with'
Gl: 'Drinking water' (water especially for drinking and not anything else; eg. sterilized drinking water)

The difference between (21) and (22) is that the water in (21) is water which is being used for drinking but it may also be used for anything else; the water is (22) is only for drinking and has no other purpose. The 'purposeful' categorizations of Polomé and Ashton do not allow for such distinctions in meaning.

2.5 Given the observed inadequacies of descriptions of -A based upon categorical sets, the purpose of this paper is to see whether the data may be better accounted for with different analytical premises. However, in order to determine this, it will be necessary to examine certain aspects of Swahili grammar. Since language is a communicative system, our analysis must attempt to define the role of -A within the context of that system.

3.0 The Swahili Verb

The verb in Swahili is composed of several agglutinative morphemes. Of interest here is the derivational suffix -i(l)i-, usually referred to as the 'prepositional' or 'applied' suffix. In addition, we will examine what has been traditionally called the 'subject' and 'object' concord markers in the verb.

3.1 The derivational system of verbal suffixes in Swahili provides information about participants in the event expressed by the verb; the type of information conveyed varies. The 'causative' and 'reciprocal' derivations signal that an additional agent in the event is present and that his role is one of 'causee' and 'co-principal agent' respectively. The information conveyed by the prepositional suffix is less clear and in the grammars the suffix is usually described in terms of a number of different meanings. Ashton's account is indicative of such approaches: (p.218) "This form gives a prepositional concept to the simple form of the verb." The functions she assigns to it are as follows:

(i) To express 'to do to, for, or on behalf of someone or to the detriment of such a one'

(23) Ni-li-mu-andik-i-a Hasan barua. 'I wrote the/a letter
I-pst-him-write-Prep.Hasan letter to give to Hasan' OR 'on his behalf.'

(24) Ni-li-m-pik-i-a Hasan chakula. 'I cooked food for Hasan' OR 'on his behalf.'

(ii) To express motion towards

(25) Ni-li-fik-i-a mji-ni. 'I arrived in town.'
I-pst-arrive-Prep.town-in

(iii) To express purpose

(26) Ni-pe sindano y--a ku-shon-e-a. 'Give me the/a sewing needle.' (2)

(iv) To express finality: also may be referred to as the emphatic use

(27) A-li-m-shika Hasan. 'He held Hasan.'

(28) A-li-m-shik-ili-a Hasan. 'He really held Hasan.'
He-pst-him-hold-prep.Hasan

In light of similarities in meaning which these 'uses' reflect, Robert Port (1972) proposes a single meaning for the prepositional[3]. Some participant other than the principal agent is involved in the occurrence of an event but the nature of his role is not specified (compare with the causative and reciprocal suffixes which do specify such information). The exact nature of the new participant's role in the event is understood by speakers and hearers with reference to the context of the construction, both linguistic and pragmatic. In (23) and (24), we see that when the new participant is human, a benefactive or dative meaning can be conveyed; if the participant is a location (25), the activity becomes located in the direction or in the place of that location. At first, (28) seems to pose a problem for the analysis since the new participant is human and the conveyed meaning is not benefactive or dative. However, by examining such constructions in actual use we can see how the meaning of the prepositional is contextually manipulated to convey meanings which involve the introduction of additional participating agencies. The following example is taken from a conversation with a woman of approximately 75 years in Mombasa (Bimomo):

....Alikuwa mgonjwa sana.	'He was very sick.
Akashikiliwa, akapelekwa	He was really held and was taken
kwa tabibu...'	to the doctor.'

The construction which interests us here is 'A-ka-shik-ili-w-a', which is the passive form of the emphatic use of the verb in (28). When Bimomo was asked what this expression meant, she explained that the man was so sick that he had to have two people hold him up, as opposed to one person in which case she could have used the verb without the prepositional (27).

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[3]MA Thesis, Columbia University. I would like to thank Ellen Contini Morava for her summary of Port's analysis since I have not yet been able to obtain a copy of the actual text. I take full responsibility for the discussion to follow because I have not the argumentation for his analysis.

When other speakers were asked about this construction they said that it could mean that two people were holding the sick man up (as opposed to only one) OR just that he was so sick that he was difficult to hold (emphatic use). What is central to these interpretations is that some participant's presence is seen to be critically involved in the event as it is being described; this additional agency may be someone other than the principal agent and the object which he is acting upon, or it may be the object itself which is seen to have a more active role than might be expected, eg. 'making the carrying out of the action difficult'. This analysis helps us understand the 'detrimental' use of the prepositional as observed by Ashton since we can now see that the detrimental aspect is attributed to the interference or reluctance of some participant to have the action occur:

(29) A-ta-tu-harib-i-a furaha yetu. 'He will ruin our happiness for us!' (Ashton: p.218)

Similarly, we may note that the suffix is used in reflexive constructions:

(30) Tu-ta-ji-jeng-e-a nyumba. 'We will build ourseves a house.' (Polomé: p.85)

Here, the participant for whom the action is being carried out is co-referential with the agents who are doing the action.

3.2 In light of the above discussion, we would like to make a terminological distinction between the 'conveyed meaning' or 'use' of a linguistic element and its 'meaning'. The former shall be referred to as the 'message' which is conveyed by a linguistic element in a particular instance of its occurrence. The 'meaning' which is postulated for that item, grammatical or lexical, is a representation which attempts to describe the semantic information which is contributed to any utterance in which it occurs. The 'meaning' of a linguistic element is an imprecise characterization; the context in which the item is used allows more precise messages to be conveyed by speakers and, conversely, to be inferred by hearers. The distinction between the meaning and the message expressed by linguistic items is illustrated by Robert Kirsner

Sample Texts: From S. Chiraghdin, N.H. Zaidi, M. Kamal Khan, O.Saidi Kusoma na Kufahamu Kiswahili Kitabu Cha Nne: Nairobi: Longman Kenya Ltd.

TABLE I: Topic: Books (Introduction to text)
Sample: 200 words

Subject Marker	Human	Inanimate
Principal Agent:	6 (28.5 o/o)	5 (23.8 o/o)
Passive Object:	0	10 (47.6 o/o)

-A Linked Nominals: Human-- 2 (9.5 o/o)
Inanimate-- 19 (90.5 o/o)

TABLE II: Topic--The Swahili Language (page 1)
Sample--220 words

Subject Marker	Human	Inanimate
Principal Agent:	4 (20 o/o)	5 (20.5 o/o)
Passive Object:	5 (20.5 o/o)	6 (30 o/o)

-A Linked Nominals: Human-- 4 (12.9 o/o)
Inanimate-- 27 (87.1 o/o)

TABLE III: Topic--The Swahili Calendar (page 17)
Sample--200 words

Subject Marker	Human	Inanimate
Principal Agent:	1 (12.5 o/o)	5 (62.5 o/o)
Passive Object:	1 (12.5 o/o)	1 (12.5 o/o)

-A Linked Nominals: Human-- 1 (4 o/o)
Inanimate-- 24 (96 o/o)

TABLE IV: Topic--The Education of an Old Man (page 7)
Sample--260 words

Subject Marker	Human	Inanimate
Principal Agent:	24 (52.1 o/o)	13 (28.3 o/o)
Passive Object:	5 (10.9 o/o)	4 (8.7 o/o)

-A Linked Nominals: Human-- 2 (15.4 o/o)
Inanimate-- 11 (84.6 o/o)

(1975) with reference to the following examples (p.5):
a. My dog brought me my slippers. Message inferred: in his mouth.
b. My wife brought me my slippers. Message: in her hand.

3.3 In traditional grammars the initial position of the verbal complex in Swahili contains a 'subject marker'. The notion of subject is never defined; typically, it is the principal agent/actor:

(31) Watu wa-na-zungumza chumba-ni. 'People are conversing
People they-pres-converse room-in in the room.'

However, other information may be marked in this position:

(32) Chumbani ku-na-zungumza watu 'In the room there are
Room-in there-pres-converse people people conversing.'

In both instances the relations expressed about the activity and the participants involved are the same: people are doing the talking and they are located in the room. As a semantic characterization of this verbal position, Robert Port (1972b) proposes the meaning FOCUS or CENTER OF ATTENTION. It is of interest to explore whether such a formulation is compatible with facts about how the subject marker is actually used in Swahili.

3.3.1 We may say that subject marking refers to the process whereby speakers can direct attention to the participants which they see to be important to the view of the event which they wish to convey. In Swahili writing, items in focus are written affixed to the verb since the verb never occurs without such a marker; that they are obligatorily associated with any verb is not surprising since the verb is the linguistic item which expresses the action that the participant in focus is seen to be participating in. If we examine texts then, we can expect to find a correlation between 'what is talked about', what is in the center of attention in a given text as a whole, and what is marked in the subject slot. The textual counts which will be referred to are given on Tables I-VI. Although the present sample is small, it is assumed that further validation will be consistent with the findings described here. We can make the following observations about the fact presented on the tables:

(i) In texts about humans, the verbal subject marker is almost always human.
(ii) In texts about inanimate things, there are more inanimate subjects than were found in texts about humans; however, the overall number of inanimate subjects when compared to the number of human subjects in these texts is less skewed than observed in (i).
(iii) In fact, in texts about inanimate things there were less conjugated verbs all together (verbs which carry subject markers). Alternative syntactic devices are used; notably, there are more -A noun constructs. This will be discussed in 4.1.

3.1.2 We observe then that the expected correlation between what is talked about (discourse focus) and what is marked in the subject marker position on the verb (verbal focus) is supported by data when the topic of discourse is human. That this is not similarly the case in texts about inanimate things suggests that another factor, in addition to the attention usually afforded to the item in discourse focus, is operative in the assignment of verbal focus in the Swahili verb: whether or not the participants being talked about are human. The fact that a participant is human carries implications for his candidacy as verbal focus; if a participant is human it is more likely that he will be marked in verbal focus, regardless of his status in the overall discourse, than if he in inanimate. It appears that two strategies for evaluating the importance of participants in events are active in the assignment of verbal focus in Swahili: (a) Status as discourse focus; and (b) Animacy. It has been suggested elsewhere (Givon: 1971; Hawkinson and Hyman: 1974) that people tend to talk about humans more than they talk about inanimate things. With data from Shona, a language spoken in Zimbabwe which is historically related to Swahili, show that a hierarchy of 'natural topic' which discriminates objects in the world according to whether or not people tend to talk about them more than others can be used to account for patterns of

grammatical usage. Specifically, they examine how hearers assign the grammatical roles of 'causee', 'benefactive', 'dative', and 'accusative' to participants in a sentence according to distinctions in the natural topicality of the participants involved. Their hierarchy ranks humans above inanimate objects and their data shows that humans are typically assigned more active roles in events, specifically those of 'causee', 'benefactive' and 'dative'. In terms of this kind of analysis we may re-formulate the strategy outlined in (b) above with reference to some notion of 'natural' or inherent topicality which things in the world are associated with regardless of their importance in any particular event and/or discourse. 'Discourse focus' will refer to the status of participants with regard to their importance in any particular discourse situation; 'inherent topicality' will refer to their importance for speakers according to criteria independent of their discourse status. Here, we have seen animacy to be one such criteria. If humans are more inherently topical than inanimate objects, we can expect to find them more often in syntactic positions which signal that their occupants are in focus. This is indeed what we have found: texts about human place human participants in focus on the verb; texts about inanimate objects do place more inanimate participants in focus but there is also a tendency to avoid using syntactic constructions which require marking focus at all. To the extent that general observations about human behavior may be admitted into the explanation of linguistic usage, we conclude that the data is coherent with an anlysis which assigns the meaning FOCUS to the subject marker position in the Swahili verb.

3.4 The above characterization of the subject marker allows us to propose a related communicative function for the object marker in Swahili. Port (1972b) suggests that this position be viewed as a secondary focus of attention, the position where a participant who is secondarily important to the event may be marked. In order to evaluate this proposal, we should again examine facts about the use of the object marker in Swahili.

3.4.1 We have noted in texts that humans are preferred in subject position on the verb (3.1.2); it is now relevant to note another skewing in Swahili usage which correlates with distinctions in animacy. When an object to the verb is human, the verb must carry an object marker referring to that object[4]; if the object is inanimate, there is rarely such an object marker. Further, if there is an object marker with an inanimate object, a definite reference results:

(33) +Ni-li-ona mtu. 'I saw the/a person.'

(34) Ni-li-mu-ona mtu. 'I saw the/a person.'
I-pst-him-see person

(35) Ni-li-ona kitu. 'I saw the/a thing.'

(36) Ni-li-ki-ona kitu. 'I saw the thing.' +'I saw a thing.'

That the presence of an object marker with inanimate objects necessarily conveys a message of definite reference is compatible with an analysis of that marker as signalling some sort of focus. The fact that such a distinction is neutralized when the object is human may be understood with reference to our premise that people are more interested in people than in things; since they usually talk about humans, who is being talked about is known (definite). Therefore, patterns of usage have developed around the assumption, or 'norm', that who is being talked about is 'known' to the speakers.

3.4.2 It is also important to note in our texts that most verbs have a subject marker ~~which refers to the principal~~ agent in the event. In texts about humans we see more active verbs with the agent in subject marker position; in texts about inanimate things there are comparatively less constructs with the agent as subject. We noted that constructs were used which avoided subject marking all together (-A linked nominals); also more passive constructions are seen (constructs where an object rather than principal agent is marked in subject position). Again we see evidence that people are concerned about focussing attention upon humans, the more active participants in events. Hence there are less passive constructs in texts about humans; and fewer verbs(requiring

[4]This is true for most current usage of Swahili. Benji Wald has noted that some idioms and proverbial expressions do not have an object marker for human objects (private communication)

that a focussed participant be marked) in texts about inanimate things.

3.4.3 With reference to the proposal that the object marker indicates a second focus of attention we observe that in Swahili, if there is an object marker on the verb, the participant must be the principal agent; hence (38) and (39) below are incorrect:

(37) Ni-li-andik-i-w-a barua. 'I was written(to/for)the/a
I-pst-write-P-passive letter letter'.

(38) *Ni-li-i-andik-i-w-a (barua) 'I was written it (the letter)'
I-pst-it-write-P-passive

(39) *Chumba-ni ku-na-wa-zungumza watu. 'In the room there is
Room-in there-pres-they-talk people conversing people'
Compare with (31).

We suggest the following as a possible explanation for this fact: Speakers typically focus attention on people and usually they focus attention upon those people who are principal agents in the event being described. This is observable in actual data. It is proposed that this is a normal/typical strategy which is employed for assigning and interpreting participants which are in focus. When this conventional configuration is used, speakers can signal the presence of another 'important' participant and assume that hearers will be able to 'keep track' of both participants. When the normal strategy is deviated from this is not the case: someone who is not the principal agent is marked in primary focus. When the principal agent is not in focus, speakers are signalling that someone else, someone who is not necessarily expected to be, is important to the perception of the event which they wish to convey. Hence, patterns of usage avoid signalling a second focus when something 'out-of-the-ordinary' is being signalled.[5] Given the way in which the object marker is used, the meaning secondary FOCUS is more descriptive than a meaning which does not specify that the focus of attention is second to some other focus, eg. that in primary focus (subject marker).

[5] In theory, there is nothing about the overall grammar of

3.4.4 There is further evidence for this analysis of the object marker if we examine its use when nominal objects are placed before the verb but are not marked in primary focus. In generative grammar, such a construction would be characterized in terms of a movement transformation called 'topicalization.' It will suffice for our purposes to note only that it is a deviation from normal word order strategies and hence calls attention to the noun which is pre-posed. Since the participant marked in primary focus usually precedes the verb, we may assume that pre-verbal position also calls attention to the participants occupying that position (in addition to subject marking on the verb). Speaker judgements of the following sentences show that when an object is brought into prominence through pre-posing before the verb, the preferred verbal configuration is one in which the pre-posed noun is marked in secondary focus. Here we see word order and object marking co-operating to signal a particular focus of attention:

(40) Hasan a-li-ona kitabu. 'Hasan saw the/a book.'
(41) ?Kitabu Hasan a-li-ona. '(As for)the book, Hasan saw.'
(42) Kitabu Hasan a-li-ki-ona. '(As for)the book, Hasan saw it.'
(43) *Hasan kitabu a-li-ona. '(As for)Hasan, the book he saw.'
(44) Hasan kitabu a-li-ki-ona. '(As for)Hasan, the book he saw it.'

Swahili which requires that this be the case. For example, in Shona, a language spoken in Zimbabwe which is structurally similar to Swahili, objects may be marked in the verb when the subject is not the principal agent, eg. when the verb is passive in form. This may be due to the fact that Shona has a different system for signalling meanings in the verb, or just that speakers have followed different communicative strategies when employing their morphology than the Swahili. (See Hawkinson and Hyman for examples, p. 160)

[6](41) is questionable because some speakers will accept it; however, all speakers with whom I spoke uniformly agreed that (42) was more acceptable than (41).

TABLE V: Topic--Story about Mfundakoka (page 10)
Sample--180 words

Subject Marker	Human	Inanimate
Principal Agent:	30 (85.7 o/o)	2 (5.7 o/o)
Passive Object:	1 (219 o/o)	2 (5.7 o/o)

-A Linked Nominals: Human-- 3 (33.3 o/o)
Inanimate-- 6 (66.6 o/c)

TABLE VI: Topic--Life of the Writer (page 13)
Sample--230 words

Subject Marker	Human	Inanimate
Principal Agent:	21 (77.8 o/o)	2 (7.4 o/o)
Passive Object:	3 (11.1 o/o)	1 (3.7 o/o)

-A Linked Nominals: Human-- 14 (70 o/o)
Inanimate-- 6 (30 o/o)

SUMMARY:

Inanimate Topics: Total Subject Markers--49
Number of Humans--17 (35 o/o)
Number of Inanimates--32 (65 o/o)

Total -A Linked Nominals--77
Number Human--7 (9 o/o)
Number Inanimate--70 (81 o/o)

Human Topics: Total Subject Markers--108
Number Humans--84 (80 o/o)
Number Inanimate--24 (20 o/o)

Total -A Linked Nominals--40
Number Human--19 (45.2 o/o)
Number Inanimate--23 (54.8 o/o)

4.0 Paraphrase Relations

It is possible now to propose certain hypotheses about the semantic contribution of -A in communication by examining -A constructions in comparison to sentences which native speakers describe as 'meaning the same thing'.

4.1 All speakers questioned offered the second sentence in each set below as a paraphrase for the -A construction sentence type given as the first member in each pair; these example sentences are taken from earlier sections of this paper:

A. (19) A-li-andika barua y--a Hasan. (2.3) 'He wrote a letter to/on behalf of Hasan.'

(23) A-li-mu-andik-i-a Hasan barua. (3.1) 'He wrote a letter to/on behalf of Hasan.'

B. (20) A-li-pika chakula ch--a Hasan. (2.3) 'He cooked food for Hasan.'

(24) A-li-m-pik-i-a Hasan chakula. (3.1) 'He cooked food for Hasan.'

While speakers will consistently claim that such sets mean the same thing, they are able to note a difference in usage: the sequences with prepositionally derived verbs (23 and 24) are more common in conversation than those with -A linked nominals (19 and 20). This fact is consistent with observations made in 3.4: when talking about people, speakers usually use linguistic constructions which explicitly assign verbal focus, rather than ones which do not. And since people talk about people more than things, we could expect them to feel that the linguistic constructions usually used when describing human participation are more frequent in their everyday speech. Since a speaker's choice about what is in focus is a subjective one, it is understandable that these sets of sentences would be regarded as similar in meaning by speakers. The relations of the participants in the event to one another with respect to the event remain unchanged; the only difference is the relative importance which the speaker attaches to each. Both -A and the prepositional verb suffix introduce additional participants into the perception of the event which is being conveyed by a

speaker; however, only the latter, with its accompanying object in secondary focus, explicitly signals that the new participant is particularly important to the event. Given this fact, a meaning for -A might be postulated in opposition to that assigned to the object marker: NON-FOCUS.

4.1.1 There are two sorts of evidence which might be regarded as support for this analysis. The first concerns observations made in 3.1.2. Since inanimate objects are less topical inherently than human objects, we can expect them to occur more often in syntactic constructions which do not signal that they are in focus; we have seen than inanimate objects are less frequently found in focus marked constructions and that, in texts where they are in discourse focus, -A constructions are used more often than those constructions requiring a focus assignment to be made. To the extent that these data show users of the language relying upon syntactic constructions conveying meanings coherent with the inherent topicality afforded the participants which a particular text is about, we can at least ascertain that -A does not signal the meaning FOCUS for the participant which follows it. The second sort of evidence compatible with this analysis is seen in the following two sample texts where the participants involved are the same but the discourse focus upon them has been experimentally manipulated:

I. Jana nilikwenda kumwona rafiki yangu mmoja. Anaitwa Hasan. Kabla ya sijafika kwake nilipita kwa rafiki mwengine. Tukazungumza habari za Hasan nikamwambia yule rafiki kuwa nitafika kwa Hasan baada ya kutoka kwake. Akasema 'Jee sasa hivi	'Yesterday I went to see a friend of mine. He is named Hasan. Before I arrived at his house I went by another friend's house. We talked about Hasan and I told this friend that I would go to Hasan's after I left his place. And he say 'Hey, just now
(a) nilimuandikia Hasan barua	(23) I wrote Hasan a letter
(b) niliandika barua ya Hasan	(19) I wrote a letter to Hasan.
Utapeleka hii barua?	Will you take the letter?'

II.	Jana nilikwenda kumwona rafiki yangu. Nilipokuwa njiani niliokota barua. [...] Ilikuwa haina jina la mtu. Nilipoingia kwa rafiki yangu nilimwambia habari za ile barua. Akasema 'Lo, jana	'Yesterday I went to see my friend. When I was on my way I found a letter. It didn't have anyone's name on it. When i got to my friend's I told him about the letter. And he said 'Oh, yesterday
(a)	niliimuandikia Hasan barua	(23) I wrote Hasan a letter
(b)	niliandika barua ya Hasan. Labda ni hiyo.'	(24) I wrote a letter to Hasan Maybe its that one.'

These two passages were read aloud to different speakers who were then asked to choose which of the options, (a) or (b), was most appropriate for completing the text in question. (a) and (b) represent the same relations between the participants with regard to their role in the event: in both, the letter is acted upon on behalf of Hasan. They differ only in their assignment of focus: (a) signals that Hasan is in focus, (b) does not. We would expect then to find that (a) would be preferred in the text where Hasan was in discourse focus (I), and that (b) would be preferred in the text where he is not. Our speakers opinions were not consistent. Some said that both were fine in I, but only one was acceptable in II; others found the converse to be true: only one was acceptable in I and both were appropriate for II. What is of interest is that the choice of what was acceptable in the instances that only one was thought to be possible were consistent: (b) was never found to be the only one possible in I, and (a) was never found to be the only sequence acceptable in II. What we may conclude then is that where both constructions are not seen to be suitable for particular texts, our predictions about which would be the more acceptable are supported. That both are acceptable for many speakers is probably due to the fact that speakers tend to rely upon the inherent topicality of participants for assigning verbal focus in everyday conversation more than they make such assignments according to discourse focus status.

4.1.2 While the above discussion could be interpreted in favor of the meaning NON-FOCUS for -A, there are other aspects of its use which do not support such an analysis. We would expect that if subject and object marking signal focus and -A signals non-focus that the participants in each position could not be co-referential; this is not the case:

(45) Ni-li-m-let-e-a barua y--a--ngu. 'I brought him my letter.'
I-pst-him-bring-to letter -A mine

(46) Ni-li-m-let-e-a barua y--a--ke. 'I brought him his letter.'
I-pst-him-bring-to letter -A his

In (45) the -A linked nominal 'my' is co-referential with the participant marked in primary focus in the verb, 'me'; in (46) it is co-referential with the item marked in secondary focus, 'him'. It is true that the participant marked in secondary focus in (46) is not necessarily co-referential with the -A linked nominal; it may refer to some other third person known to the speaker and hearer. However, it is the fact that it may refer to the same participant which is problemmatic for this analysis. We should also note that the fact that -A must follow a noun phrase (or be understood as referring to some noun phrase already mentioned) is also not compatible with an analysis of its meaning as NON-FOCUS. This formulation as stated does not specify anything but that the element which is associated with it is not in the speaker's main focus of attention; it does not say that the element is dependent in some way upon some other item. -A linked nominals appear to be important to the description of an event only in terms of their relationship with some other participant in the event (N_1 as described in 2.0). They are not important to the perception of the event which the speaker is trying to convey as independent entities but rather, they wouldn't be mentioned at all were it not for the relation which they are seen to have with some other participant in the event.

4.2 In conclusion, we can say that -A does not have as its meaning in the sense defined in 3,2 the value NON-FOCUS. We should examine now in more detail the similarities between

the messages convevable by the prepositional derivation to the verb and those conveyed by -A. The two overlap to some extent, the paraphrases of 4.1 are a case in point. Also we should remember the directional 'uses' of the two as described in 2.1 (v) and 3.1 (ii). Similarly, with reference to (47) we note that the prepositional also has an 'information about' use paralleling that which was described for -A in 2.1 (vi):

(47) Tu-li-ong-ele-a mambo y--a nadharia y--a maana.
We-pst-talk-prep affairs -A theory -A meaning

Lit: 'We talked to/for things of the theory of meaning.'
Gl: 'We talked about aspects of semantic theory.'

-A and the prepositional both reflect an imprecision in meaning: they signal that some participant is around but they do not specify what his role is. This is something which must be inferred by speakers according to context. In contrast to one another, the prepositional signals that the new participant is involved in the event as an independent entity and is important to the event's description for that reason while -A signals the opposite: that the new participant is not important as a single entity but rather in terms of his relationship with some other participant in the event. Presumably, if that participant were not present the -A linked nominal would not be mentioned; that this participant is not important, hence not in focus, is something inferred by hearers because of the dependency relationship which exists between the two nouns. Hence the characterization NON-FOCUS as a meaning for -A was seen to be inadequate. The fact that -A and the prepositional both reflect a lack of role specification for the participant which they introduce appears to be the reason for their overlap in usage. To the extent that they both convey information about additional participants this overlap may be attributed to an overlap in meaning; to the extent that they differ we must look elsewhere for an explanation. It is here that we must begin to see how speaker's employment of these two imprecise meanings in similar contexts is what gives rise to their ability to convey the same sorts of messages. 21

4.3 The messages 'benefactive', 'dative', 'possessive', etc.

are not meanings conveyed by the particular linguistic elements under discussion here; rather, they are relations about the participants introduced by them which are inferred by speakers and hearers alike according to the contexts in which they occur. Examining situations where -A and prepositional objects occur in the same immediate linguistic environments can begin to show us how such context can influence the messages conveyed by these two variants. It should be acknowledged that this is not the only sort of context which plays a role in the communication of messages, pragmatic context will also be seen to be important.

(48) Ni-li-andika barua. 'I wrote a letter'

(49) Ni-li-andika barua ya Hasan. 'I wrote a letter to give to Hasan/on his behalf.'

(50) *Ni-li-andika barua ya Hasan ya jamaa zake. 'I wrote a letter for Hasan to his family.' (a)
'I wrote Hasan's letter to his family/on their behalf.'(b)

(51) Ni-li-andika barua ya Hasan kwa jamaa zake. (a) above

(52) Ni-li-andika barua ya Hasan kwa ajili ya jamaa zake. (b)

These example show that -A can only convey messages of benefactive and dative if it is not followed by another -A construction which is also candidate to be associated with such messages. In the case that other participants are also to be introduced, the latter must be introduced by alternative linguistic devices which specify their role; thus the message conveyed by -A becomes clarified by reference to what messages are not signalled by the other construction.

(53) Ni-li-mu-andik-i-a Hasan barua. 'I wrote a letter to give to Hasan/on his bahalf.'

(54) Ni-li-mu-andik-i-a Hasan barua ya jamaa zake. (50) a/b

(55) Ni-li-wa-andik-i-a jamaa za Hasan barua yake. (50) a/b

(56) *Ni-li-mu-andik-i-a Hasan barua ya jamaa zake ya ndugu zao.
'I wrote Hasan a letter to/for his family to/for their relatives.'

(57) Ni-li-mu-andik-i-a Hasan barua ya jamaa zake kwa ndugu zao. 22
*'I wrote Hasan a letter for his family to their friends.
'I wrote Hasan a letter to/for his family at the home of their friends.'

These sentences show that when the prepositional is used to introduce one participant that -A is used to introduce a second; that is, the prepositional accomplishes the same communicative task as the independent prepositions of (51) and (52) to the extent that it alleviates an inferential overload which occurs when two -A introduced participants are equally candidate for two different roles, eg. benefactive and dative. There is a problem in determining whether the prepositional has any priority over the -A linked nominal for a particular role. We have proposed that its object is more in attention (with reference to object marking) than an -A linked nominal whose referent is not signalled in the verb; it is unclear whether a particular role, benefactive or dative, is seen by speakers to be more likely to be in the center of attention than another. These examples and those which follow suggest that the more likely role may vary according to particular situations and the nature of the participants involved. While the (a) reading appears more appropriated to (54) and (55) on initial reading, the (b) reading is also quite possible. Yet in (64) and (65) the second reading seems more acceptable at first glance. It would seem then that such judgements are subject more to interpretation according to conventional attitudes about who is more important, the benefactor or the receiver, in any particular activity (in addition to pragmatic context) than they are determined by any given grammatical cue, eg. marking in or outside of the verb. This must be examined in actual conversations.

(58) Ni-li-leta zawadi. 'I brought a present.'

(59) Ni-li-leta zawadi ya Hasan. 'I brought Hasan a present.'

(60) *Ni-li-leta zawadi ya Hasan ya mamake. 'I brought to/for Hasan a present to/for his mother.' (50)

(61) Ni-li-leta zawadi ya Hasan kwa mamake. 'I brought a present for Hasan to his mother.' (51)

(62) Ni-li-leta zawadi ya Hasan kwa ajili ya mamake. 'to Hasan because/on behalf of his mother.' (52)

(63) Ni-li-m-let-e-a Hasan zawadi. 'I brought Hasan a present'

(64) Ni-li-m-let-e-a Hasan zawadi ya mamake. (61)/(62)

(65) Ni-li-m-let-e-a mamake Hasan zawadi yake. (61)/(62)

(66) *Ni-li-m-let-e-a Hasan zawadi ya mamake ya rafiki yake.

'I brought Hasan a present for his mother for his/her friend.'

(67) Ni-li-m-let-e-a Hasan zawadi ya mamake kwa rafiki yake.

*'I brought Hasan a present for his mother to his/her friend.'
'I brought Hasan a present for his mother at his/her friend's house.'

It is interesting to note in (57) and (67) that only one benefactive and one dative relation is possible in the description of any single activity; that this is also the case in English can be seen in the glosses as given. These examples then show that a particular linguistic element can reflect only one semantic relation in a particular situation, and that which of a set of possible messages is determined according to the context of occurrence and the sorts of relationships which are being signalled by other linguistic items. We will see in the following section (4.4) that the same linguistic item may be used more than once in an utterance if the messages which it conveys in each instance of occurrence is the same type of semantic relation. (see 69) The message conveyed by 'kwa' in (57) and (58) show us again how linguistic elements, when the context of their occurrence eliminates the possibility that they convey a particular message, can be used by speakers for conveying another message. This process is the same at that which we have been describing with reference to -A and the prepositional suffix.

4.4 We should note here the part which the Bantu noun class concord system plays in the disambiguation of multiple strings of -A linked participants. Swahili, as with other Bantu languages of Africa, is characterized by a nominal class gender system which divides nominals into a number of different classes, each of which is associated with a particular class agreement marker. It is these which are used for subject and object marking, as well as determining which concord marker will be prefixed to -A (see 2.0). Since all humans fall into the same concord class, such agreement markers cannot be used for disambiguation of roles among human participants except in special cases where certain nouns have differing agreement markers ('child' as compared to 'friend' in 68):

(68) A-li-mu-alika mtoto wa rafiki ya mwalimu wa mke wa Hasan.'
He-pst-him-invite child of friend of teacher of wife of H.

'He invited the child of the/a friend of Hasan's wife's teacher.'

Typically, -A linked nominals are interpreted as being in relation to the noun which they immediately follow and hence the concord agreement system is used mainly as a device to reinforce the fact that an association is being set up between a particular pair of nouns and not some other:

(69) A-li-mu-andik-i-a barua ya habari za serikali ya nchi
He-pst-him-write-prep letter of news of government of country/s
za kiafrika.
of African-ness

Lit:'He wrote him a letter of the news of the government of African countries'

Gl: 'He wrote him a letter about news about the government of the African countries.' (a)

'He wrote him a letter of government news about the African countries.' (b)

'He wrote him a letter about the government's news about the African countries.' (c)

As the glosses above show, there is some difficulty rendering the messages conveyed by -A into English translation; English prepositions tend to suggest that more information is being specifically conveyed by -A than actually is the case. What is important to note is that a number of possible inferences are not possible because of the concord agreement markings:

Gl: *He wrote him a letter about/of news about the governments of the African countries. (this would require the class concord of serikali Z--A)

*He wrote him letters... (this would require barua Z--A)

*He wrote....the/an African country (this would take nchi Y--A)

Since everyone knows that there is no one government for African countries (excluding perhaps the OAU), the first gloss above is unlikely to be heard by hearers; the difference between the messages in (b) and (c) are minimal if they exist at all apart from the English translation.

Examples such as (70) below show more clearly how -A linked nominals may be heard in relation to nouns which do not immediately precede them, although again this way of

looking at -A derives mainly from problems which arise in the English translation of the messages which it conveys:

(70) A-li-ni-andik-i-a barua ya habari zake za kufika.
He-pst-me-write-to letter of news of-his of arriving

Here, 'arriving' is in relation to 'news', not 'his'.

4.5 To conclude this section, it is helpful to emntion some of the main points brought up in the preceding discussion:

(1) -A linked participants are not typically participants in focus although they may be if there is an object marker in the verb which is co-referential (4.1)

(2) -A and the prepositional suffix overlap in meaning to the extent that they both carry information that an additional participant is present in the situation being described;

(3) They differ in that the participant which is introduced by the preposition is an independent entity involved in the event's occurrence, hence is presence is signalled directly on the verb;

(4) By comparison, the participant introduced by -A is not important to the event as an independent entity; in fact, it is only mentioned in-so-far as the relation which it has with some other participant is seen by speakers to be relevant to the perception of the event which they are trying to convey(4.2)

(5) The meanings of -A and the prepositional are imprecise; the messages which they actually convey in any particular instances of their occurrence are inferences on the part of speakers and hearers which are determined by various aspects of their context. The presence or absence of additional participants, introduced by -A or the prepostional suffix, or independent prepositions such as 'kwa' have been shown to be relvant feature of context. Presumably the same can be illustrated for other verbal derivations, as well as for other independent prepositions. It is also clear that lexical considerations about the meanings conveyed by particular verbs, and aspects of the nominal agreement system are relevant.

(6) We have also noted that problems in accounting for how -A can convey a wide variety of messages is due, in part, to the fact that English is not an adequate translation device.

5.0 Meaning

Throughout the preceding discussion we have referred to the 'meaning' of -A without attempting to formulate a single statement of that meaning. The reason is obvious; the formulation cannot be precise. -A as a linguistic sign signals a general kind of 'relational' concept which speakers use for conveying a variety of messages according to different contexts. Traditional grammarians have been aware of this fact about -A: for Ashton, -A is a particle of relationship; for Polomé, it is a connective particle. What is missing from traditional analyses is any attempt to explain, given that -A does 'relate' or 'connect', how speakers are able to use it productively in speech to signal a wide spectrum of messages and, more importantly perhaps, how they are able to understand such messages as "meaning what they mean" in each instance in which they occur. Trully, we can only hypothesize about how such communication is accomplished because the knowledge which speakers have is intuitive; it cannot be reached through direct questioning. However, if the data can be described according to identifiable contexts, and the messages which are conveyed can be understood in those contexts with reference to a proposed meaning for that linguistic element, then, at least, we have begun to identify possible methods whereby language can be used systematically by people for the communication of ideas.

As an hypothesis, we propose the following meaning for -A: -A signals that the two items in construct with it are in some unspecified relation or association such that the second noun is relevant to the event being described only in terms of the relation which it is seen to hold with the first. Hence, we can say that N_2 is dependent upon N_1 in the syntactic configuration N_1 -A N_2. Since N_2 is dependent upon N_1, it is usually the case that it is not in verbal focus; this is an inference about its importance which speakers make, not something which is specified by -A itself. This we know because N_2 may be co-referential with

a noun in verbal focus (see 4.1.2). On the other hand, by virtue of its relation with N_2, N_1 becomes somehow delimited from other entities of its type in the world. Again, the way in which it differs is not specified by -A: we have seen that the relation may be seen as one between two individual entities, eg. benefactor (N_2) and object acted upon (N_1) (see 2.3), or possessor and possessed (2.1), or it may be seen as a relation between a single entity and one of its characteristics, eg. an object and an attribute. (see 2.1)

6.0 Contrast of -A Environments

It is now interesting to look at how different messages conveyed by -A are influenced by features of the immediate context; that is, how the nature of the nouns themselves which are in construct contribute to the message which is expressed. Throughout the discussion we have spoken of 'hearers' when we refer to the notion of 'inference' (3.2) and 'speakers' when we talk about 'conveying messages'; it should be made clear that the process described is the same in both cases. Speakers and hearers draw upon the same sorts of contextual information for constructing and for interpreting linguistic sequences which are meaningful. We have discussed how aspects of the overall syntactic configuration and grammatical agreement affect the messages communicated by -A; similarly we have showed how the animacy or 'topicality' of the participant introduced into an utterance may influence whether or not an -A construction will be used at all, eg. human participants more likely to be marked directly in the verb rather than linked by -A. Now we will concern ourselves with features of the two nouns in relation to the extent that we can show that such may be influencing the inference of particular messages.

6.1 First of all, we can see that benefactive and dative messages are constrained to situations where the second noun is human and the first is inanimate:

(71) A-li-m-tafuta mbwa w--a mwalimu. 'He looked for the teacher's dog.' NOT 'he sought the dog on behalf of the teacher.'
He-pst-him-seek dog 'of' teacher

(72) A-li-m-tafuta mtoto wa mwalimu. 'He sought the teacher's child' NOT 'He sought the child for the teacher.'

(73) A-li-tafuta kitabu ch--a mwalimu. 'He sought the teacher's book' OR 'He sought the/a book for the teacher.'

That benefactive and dative messages cannot be expressed by constructions such as (71) and (72) may reflect considerations about the likelihood that certain participants are benefactors or receivers and, similarly, that particular things can be

acted upon on behalf of those said participants. As observed by Hawkinson and Hyman (1974: p. 161), benefactors and receivers are typically animate while obejcts acted upon (accusatives in their terminology) are usually inanimate. We have observed that verbal focus is typically assigned to more active participants in events, eg. agents (see 3.4.3) and that when there is a prepositional suffix on the verb secondarily-focussed participants may be interpreted as benefactors or receivers (3.1). Further, it is observed that such constructions are used more frequently than -A constructs for conveying such relationships (4.1). Hence, we can propose that hearers expect that if such a relationship is to be expressed it will be done according to normal strategies, eg. that described above. However, when there is no prepositional suffix signalling that an added participant is involved in the event and there are two participants (in addition to the principal agent) who are equally candidate for an active role in the event, then the more active role is assigned to the participant whose presence is signalled in the verb as is seen in (71) and (72). That the relation conveyed is possessive and not anything else can be understood with reference to real-world considerations: humans do not signify directions or measures or or inherent features of other things in the world. (see messages conveyable by -A in 2.0).

On the other hand, in (73) there is no information in the verb specifying that one participant is more important than another. Since the nouns in construct are differentiated according to animacy a more active role may be assigned to the more animate participant since animate beings usually are more active than inanimate objects in the bringing about of events. Note that this will only occur when the activity can be heard as one which is carried out on behalf of or towards some participant:

(74) *Ni-li-ku-siki-li-a sauti ya mwimbaji.
I-pst-you-hear-prep.voice'of' singer
'I heard the voice of the singer for you.'

(75) Ni-li-sikia sauti ya mwimbaji.
I-pst-hear voice'of'singer
*'I heard the voice for/to the singer.'
'I heard the singer's voice.'

Example (74) shows that some activities cannot be heard with reference to a benefactive or dative participant, even when the normal strategies for conveying such messages are used. Hence, (74) is unacceptable and (75) is only appropriate if a possessive relationship is heard.

That speakers do rely upon facts about the animacy of the nouns in construct with -A for inferring which participants are more active or important is evidenced by the fact that all speakers questioned about the 'meaning' of (73) gave (76), a sentence where the human noun is placed into verbal focus, as a paraphrase of the relations expressed:

(76) A-li-m-tafut-i-a mwalimu kitabu. 'He sought the/a book for the teacher.'

In principle, a sentence where the possessive relationship, one which assigns a less important role to the human noun, could have been suggested by native speakers. That speakers rely upon object marking as a cue to inference is revealed by example (77) where the 'book' of (75) is marked in verbal focus and the benefactive role for the 'teacher' is no longer possible:

(77) A-li-ki-tafuta kitabu cha mwalimu. 'He sought the teacher's book.'

This shows the importance of object marking versus non-marking for the correct inference of messages when the first noun in -A construct is inanimate. We noted in 3.4.1 that human objects were almost always marked in secondary focus in the verb if that position was available[6] while inanimate objects were not. We are now in a position to propose why this might be the case: Since humans are more active than

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[6] It should be noted that it is possible to have a human participant who is not marked in secondary focus because some other participant is signalled in that position:

(i) Ni-li-ku-pik-ish-i-a Fatuma chakula chako.
I-pst-you-cook-cause-prep Fatuma food your

'I had Fatma cook your food for you.' Here, 'Fatuma' is a human participant whose presence is not signalled in secondary focus because the benefactor 'you' is marked there. That 'Fatuma' is candidate for focus is shown in (ii) where there is no benefactor present:

(ii) Ni-li-m-pik-ish-a Fatuma chakula chako. 'I had Fatuma cook your food.'

inanimate objects they are usually more important in the description of events, assuming that people are concerned with describing an event with reference to those participants responsible for its having occurred. Since humans are more active, they are usually in the focus of attention. Hence it would not affect the overall message conveyed if they were not marked in secondary focus; particularly, since the most active participant (agent) is usually marked in primary focus. Therefore, we might propose that current patterns of usage in Swahili have developed as follows: the decision about whether or not a particular human participant should be marked in secondary focus has been so often determined in favor of object marking that speakers have come not to worry about it at all; human participants are just always marked in the verb. On the other hand, since inanimate things are not usually active in the bringing about of events, and hence not usually important to the perception of the event being conveyed, speakers have reserved object marking for signalling special attention on inanimate objects. Hence, as noted in 3.4.1, when inanimate objects are marked in secondary focus definite reference is being made to some item which has been previously mentioned in discourse or which is assumed to be known by the hearer(s). In contrast, human objects marked in secondary focus may be definite or indefinite.

6.2 There are fewer presuppostions about the kinds of relations which inanimate objects may have to one another; hence we will find that speakers and hearers must rely more upon pragmatic aspects of the speech situation for interpreting such relationships. This is an area which needs further investigation; it will suffice for the moment to examine how the constructs with two inanimate nouns are multiply ambiguous. In Swahili, many nominal forms may refer to concrete entities or abstract qualities as seen in (78):

(78) Sanduku l--a rangi. 'Box containing paint(s)' OR 'Colored/painted box'

Further, two nouns may be in relation to one another with reference to some activity in which they are both involved:

(79) Sanduku l--a kuni. (1) 'Box containing firewood'
(2) 'Box for firewood' (to be used for holding the wood although it might be used for other things as well)
(3) 'Firewood-box' (a box whose sole purpose is for storing firewood, not anything else)

Given the infinite variety of social interactions possible, we cannot begin to define which of a set of possible relations will be conveyed in a particular speech situation. We can, however, examine how different messages are inferrable according to differences in pragmatic and/or discourse context:

I. Jana nilitaka kupika biriani. Lakini kulikuwa hakuna kuni nyumbani. Kwa hiyo nikamtuma ndugu yangu kuniletea sanduku la kuni ili niwashe moto mapema.
'Yesterday I wanted to cook biriani, but there was no firewood in the house. So I sent my brother to bring me a box of firewood so I could light the fire early.'

II. Alikwenda mwituni kutafuta kuni. Akapata kuni nzuri lakini alikuwa hawezi kuzibeba zote. Basi akamtuma rafiki yake kumletea sanduku la kuni. Halafu akaniletea zote.
'He went to the woods to look for the wood. He got some nice wood but he couldn't carry it all. So he sent his friend to bring him a box for the wood (OR a firewood-box). Afterwards he brought me all of it.

The above examples show us two things: first, they provide us with a context for the messages given in (79) and, secondly, they show us that in some cases, eg. II, the difference between two possible messages is not important for understanding what is being described. We have suggested that the language has linguistic signs which are associated with meanings (see 3.2), and that these meanings are imprecise. Further we have said that more precise messages are inferred by people when these linguistic signs are used in different contexts. We can see in II above that, in some contexts, precise inferences about the message conveyed are not crucial for the understanding of what is being said. We can say here that the difference in message content between (79)-2 and-3 is not communicatively

significant; that is, whether the friend of the brother brings a box to put the wood into or a box specially made for that purpose is irrelevant for the practical outcome of the activity--that a box be brought and the wood put in it. Similarly for the listener of this narrative; what the speaker is describing is not altered because of an imprecise message about what kind of box was used since it is not particularly important for the theme of the narrative. We can, however, think of contexts where the difference between (79)-2 and -3 would be communicatively significant:

III. Jana babangu alikuwa	Yesterday my father was
akikuma kuni mwituni.	cutting wood in the forest.
akatuma mtu moja	He sent one person
kumletea sanduku la	to bring him a box for
kuni. Mwanamume yule	the wood. That man,
aliporudi, babangu	when he returned, my father
alianza kupiga kelele,	began to shout,
akasema hakutaka huyo	he said that he hadn't wanted
amletee sanduku lolote,	that man to bring him just
alitaka arudi mpaka	any box, he had wanted him
nyumbani kupata sanduku	to go all the way back to
letu la kuni!	the house to get our firewood-box!

6.2.1 We should note that not all nominal forms in Swahili have the dual reference to abstract and concrete concepts as noted above. Also we can show that certain presuppositions about the 'inalienability' of particular inanimate things from human owners will influence what inferences are possible when these items are talked about:

(80) Ni-na habari z-a-ko. (1) 'I have news to give/tell you.'
I-have news 'of'you (2) 'I have your news'(which you sent or which is about you)

(81) Ni-na huba yako. (1) 'I love you.'(I have love for you)
love (2) 'I have your love' (You love me)

(82) Ni-na haya yako. (1) 'I am shy of you'(I have shyness for you)
shyness (2) 'I have your shyness' (I have a shyness like your shyness)

(83) Ni-na sifa zako. (1)*'I have praises for you'
praises (2) 'I have praises (about me) which are like the ones you have (about you)

6.5 It is important for this discussion to examine how the meanings postulated for -A (see 5.0) and for the prepositional suffix (see 3.1) interact in a single construction. If they contradict one another our analysis will be invalid. However, if they can be used to explain how people infer the messages that they do from such constructions then we can conclude that the meanings are coherent with the data. Again, we acknowledge that we cannot prove through any scientific procedure that our hypothesized meanings are true as absolut definitions; they are only valid to the extent that they allow us to explain patterns of language use. In 2.4 we presented two examples with their associated differences in message-content which Ashton's and Polomé's 'purposeful' categories do not differentiate sufficiently:

(21) Maji y--a ku-nywa. 'Water to drink'

(22) Maji y--a ku-nyw-i-a. 'Drinking water'

It is constructions such as (22) which interest us here; the interest is to look at differences in the message conveyed which result from the presence or absence of the prepositional suffix on the verbal noun in construct. The following examples are relevant for the contrasts which are to be examined:

(84) a. +Sindano y--a ku-shona. 'Needle to sew'

b. Sindano y--a ku-shon-e-a. 'Needle to sew with'/ 'Sewing needle'

c. Sindano y--a ku-shona nguo. 'Needle to sew clothes'

(85) a. +Maziwa y--a ku-lisha. 'Milk to feed'

b. Maziwa y--a ku-lish-i-a. 'Milk to feed with' (eg. for giving a child medicine)

c. Maziwa y--a ku-m-lisha mtoto. 'Milk to feed the child'

(86) a. Vitambaa vya ku-uza. 'Cloth to sell'(but not necessarily)

b. Vitambaa vya ku-uz-i-a. 'Cloth to sell with' (eg. to wrap the purchases in)

c. Vitambaa vya ku-uz-w-a. 'Cloth to be sold' (which you can't use for anything else)

(87) a. Sanduku la ku-beba. 'Box to carry (something)'

b. Sanduku la ku-beb-e-a. 'Box whose only purpose is for carrying things'/'Carrying box'

(88) a. Maziwa ya ku-chemsha. 'Milk which is boiled'/'Boiled milk'

b. Maziwa ya ku-chemsh-w-a. 'Milk which is to be boiled'

The message which each of these constructions conveys shows how speakers infer different roles for the first noun in construct (N_1) according to information provided by verbal suffixes on the verbal noun to which it is linked (N_2). For all constructions, it is inferred that N_1 is somehow involved in the activity described by N_2; this message is conveyed with reference to the fact that -A signals some relation between a thing and an event and, typically, we find things in the world as participants in events. Since there is no information in the verb about the presence of an additional participant in the (a) sentences, the messages which are inferred involve N_1 as a participant which is being acted upon in the event described. Because needles cannot be 'sewed' and milk cannot be 'fed', (84a) and (85a) are not acceptable. However, the importance of pragmatic context must be emphasized here. Both of these constructs may be heard in actual conversation under particular circumstances. With reference to (84), if someone wants to sew and asks someone else for a needle, he will most probably specify a sewing needle as in (84b). If, however, the second speaker didn't hear him he may reply, 'a needle for what?' (sindano y-a nini?). And our first speaker may then reply, quite acceptably, with the verb form in (84a): '--ya ku-shona'. It is with reference to this 'non-specific' nature of the relationship expressed by -A that we can understand why (84c)and (85c) are acceptable: When there is no information about participant roles in the verb, the relation of object acted upon in the activity described is inferred. If however there is information elsewhere, eg. somewhere else in context, that this is not the relation being described, then some other role for the first participant will be inferred. Hence, in (84c) 'clothes' is specified as the object of 'to sew' and speakers do not infer that 'needle' is to be the object of sewing; in fact, nothing much about needle is being conveyed but that it is to be associated with the sewing of clothes. However, since needles are used to sew clothes with, it will be inferred that the needle is to sew these particular clothes, otherwise it would not have been associated with them. Note that the

needle is not specified as a sewing needle; it may be any kind of needle which is to be involved in the sewing of the clothes.

On the other hand, the (b) sentences in (84) - (88) show consistently that the relation inferred between the first noun and the activity is one in which the noun is assigned an instrumental role. -A signals a relation; the prepositional suffix signals that a new participant in the event is relevant to the description of that event. It is but one inferential 'jump' for hearers to assume that N_1 is the participant which the prepositional suffix in the verb is referring to. especially since -A says that he is somehow related to the event described by that verb. The prepositional suffix signalling N_1 as an instrument in the activity described by N_2 occurs when people are concerned about conveying information about N_1, not about N_2. This subordinate relation between the two nouns in construct with reference to their importance to the overall event being described was mentioned in 5.0. However, this does not preclude the possibility that the activity may also be important; it is if the identity of N_1 is to be properly understood by hearers. Hence, constructs such as (84b) and (85a) may be used in situations where this understanding is jeopardized. While speaker judgements of (84)-(88) were generally agreed upon by all people questioned, the fact that more thoughtful speakers do recognize that even the 'unacceptable' sequences do occur in speech is further support for the claim that pragmatic context can play a crucial role in determining how speakers organize the communication of their thoughts.

A further perusal of the examples given bring forth a number of observations which, while they are not precluded by the analysis given, are not necessarily to be predicted by it. With reference to the (a) sentences of all the examples, it appears that the absence of any verbal suffix implies that there is no specific relationship expressed; that is, the relation which will be inferred will be that which is the simplest for speakers to imagine, given the nature of the

noun and the activity which it is associated with. Hence, the inferred message for (87a) is not that the box is to be carried (object of the action) but that it is to be used to carry something in; typically boxes are talked about with reference to what they contain and not how they are to be operated upon as entities independent of their contents. However, in context the latter inference is also possible: Sanduku hili ni langu la kubeba na hilo ni lako. 'This box is for me to carry (is mine 'of' to carry) and that one is for you.' The same contrast is found with other associations between verbs of movement and objects used for moving:

(89) a. Magari ya ku-hama. 'Vehicles to be used for moving' (but not necessarily vehicles only associated with that activity; they may be used for something else later) COMPARE
leave residence

b. Magari ya kuhamia. 'Moving vans' (vehicles designed for that particular purpose)

Likewise, (88a) is of interest when contrasted with (88b) because the message conveyed is not that the milk is to be boiled (paralleling the other a.sentences) but rather, the message is that the milk has already been boiled. We may be able to interpret this contrast when we consider the activity described and its effect upon the participant involved. In (84), (86) and (87), the events expressed do not alter the nature of the objects involved in them. However, in (88), once the milk is boiled it can no longer return to a state of being 'not boiled'; hence, the temporary relation as found in the other examples is not possible. We may propose that when an object is associated with an activity which alters its state of existence, speakers have come to assume that the change has already occurred or the relation would not have been mentioned in the first place. Since they have the passive suffix which specifies an 'object acted upon' role this device has been used to cue the inference that the object is to be changed but has not yet been so altered. These patterns of usage have been conventionalized through repeated usage; that is, there is nothing in the meaning of -A or in the lexical meaning of 'to boil' that specifies that these

messages are the only ones possible. In fact, we have already seen a number of different messages which can be conveyed by associations between verbal activities and their participants. We can see that this pattern of inference has been conventionalized by referring to parallel situations in the language:

(90) a. Samaki ya kukaanga. 'Fried fish'
b. Samaki ya kukaangwa. 'Fish which is to be fried'
(91) a. Nyama ya kuchoma. 'Barbecued meat'
b. Nyama ya kuchomwa. 'Meat which is to be barbecued'
(92) a. Nywele za kusuka. 'Braided hair'
b. Nywele za kusukwa. 'Hair which is to be braided'
(93) a. Nyama ya kukatakata. 'Chopped meat'
b. Nyama ya kukatwakatwa. 'Meat which is to be chopped'

These constructions and the messages which they convey should be considered in contrast to the (a) sentences of examples (84)-(87); similarly, with those that follow:

(94) Nguo za kuvaa. 'Clothes to wear' not 'Worn clothes'
(95) Kazi ya kufanya. 'Work to do' not 'Work completed'
(96) Vitu vya kununua. 'Things to buy' not 'Bought things'

The meanings proposed for -A and the prepositional suffix together are used to signal (1) a relation between an object and an activity and (2) that the relation is one in which the object is seen as participant in the activity described. When the prepositional suffix is not used, a associated change in meaning results: the associated object is an object acted upon rather than an object participating in the event. It is obvious from the above examples that speakers also draw upon other verbal suffixes, eg. the passive (-w-), to signal different messages. While this section has shown that the meanings of the prepositional and -A co-operate together in conveying particular messages, we have also seen that the meaning of the prepositional contrasts with other verbal suffixes in construct with -A. Further, contrasts in the messages conveyed are determined to some extent by the nature of the activity described; that is, the message conveyed by a particular suffix on the verb cannot be analyzed according to a specific modification of meaning signalled by the suffix.

Verbal suffixes modify the lexical meanings of the verb roots in Swahili, but the meanings associated with each suffix, as we have seen with the prepositional, is imprecise. More precise messages are conveyed, and inferred, only when the suffixes are used in a specific linguistic context. This section has shown that conventional associations between activities and the things in the world which participate in them may be interpreted by the analyst as influencing the kinds of messages which speakers attach to particular linguistic constructions. For a more complete understanding of the function of -A in communication such patterns of inference deserve further study; similarly, analysis of the verbal suffixal system should reveal additional ways in which the meaning of -A is exploited by speakers to convey a variety of messages.

6.6 With reference to the preceding subsections (6.0-6.5) it is significant to note how contrasts between the animacy of the nouns in construct with -A delimit what messages may be conveyed by a particular combination of nouns. When both nouns in construct are human, there is only one possible message which can be conveyed; we might refer to it as the 'possessive' or 'genitive'. The message is that conveyed by constructs such as 'John's daughter' or 'Mary's son' in English. This was discussed in 6.1. When one noun in construct is human, there are more messages possible but they are predictable with reference to the linguistic environment of the construct: (a) If the verb is underived and there are no other participants introduced by prepositions which specify benefactive or dative relations (see 4.3), a human noun attached to an inanimate noun may convey a benefactive or dative message. The lexical meaning of the verb will determine whether such a message is conveyed. (b) If the conditions of (a) are not fulfilled then the message conveyed will be 'genitive' (as above).[7] What is

[7]The construct where N_1 is human and N_2 is inanimate has not been discussed here but the same is true in such cases; the

interesting is that the number of possible messages when both nouns are inanimate is much less predictable with reference to cues in the immediate linguistic context. As we saw in 6.2. the messages conveyed by two inanimate nouns in construct with -A may often vary according to pragmatic context. The question to pose then is one concerning why it is possible to isolate features of the immediate linguistic context which will predict which message may be inferred when one or both of the nouns in construct are human, but it is not possible to do so when both nouns are human. Further, when both nouns are human only one message is inferrable. Here we note a skewing of message possibilities based upon the animacy identity of the nouns in construct. Again, it is possible to propose a reason for this skewing if we look to our hyopthesis about the importance of people in everyday discourse. Grammatical patterns of usage develop through people's use of the morphological structures of their language. As we have seen with the object marker in Swahili, speakers may rely upon semantic features of participants in the world when determining the kinds of morphological patterns which are used to represent them; with the object marker, an object's'humanness' makes him candidate for object marking. We saw also that a participant's'inanimateness' made him less of a candidate for subject marking. We related these two patterns of usage to considerations of semantic notions of 'focus' in discourse as well as general observations about what people like to talk about. Here we see that humans in construct with -A can convey a limited number of messages, limited in comparison with inanimate objects. This may be attributed to the overall concern which speakers have for what humans are doing in the event's being described. Since they are more interested in humans, they have more

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number of possible messages is severely limited: (a) N_2 is a locative: 'Teachers of that region' (see 2.2); (b) N_2 is an attribute (characteristic) of N_1: 'Child of happiness' (see 2.1).

presuppostions about the kinds of roles which humans may have in events. This hypothesis is coherent with our observation that the construct whose message can only be one thing is that construct where two humans are in relation (see 6.1). When only one of the two nouns is human, more messages are possible. Still, they are fewer than when both nouns are inanimate and they are predictable from the linguistic environment of the construct. Relations between inanimate nouns are often unclear until one refers to the wider pragmatic context of the utteracne. Speakers have less of an interest in inanimate things and hence have fewer presuppositions about the kinds of relations which they may have to one another.

7.0 Conclusion

The preceding discussion was based upon several theoretical assumptions about the nature of language. Central to the analysis there is a concern for the study of language as a communicative system. This orientation assumes that all linguistic signs in a language are somehow MEANINGFUL. This does not imply that they are all uniquely meaningful; that is, there may be more than one symbol conveying the same, or similar, meaning. Likewise, there may be symbols which convey more than one meaning. However, we base our investigation upon the fact that language is a symbolic system for representing meaning and therefore our initial working hypothesis is that a particular sign, -A in this paper, has some constant semantic contribution to every utterance in which it occurs. By identifying this meaning we should come closer to understanding how it is used for the communication of various messages. If it were possible for us to describe all the 'uses' of -A in terms of lexical and grammatical environments which are mutually exclusive of one another, our analysis might be in favor of postulating a number of different -A signs whose morphological shapes are superficially the same--one sign with more than one meaning. However, the overlap observed in the traditional categories summarized in 2.0, together with the manipulations of message according to differences in context which were examined in 6.0, revealed that this kind of analysis is inadequate.

7.1 It was our intention in this paper to identify the communicative role of -A in Swahili; that is, what is the meaningful import which it brings to any utterance in which it occurs. We attempted to isolate some of the grammatical and lexical cues which allow speakers and hearers alike to infer different messages from the use of a single linguistic item Similarly, we saw that such aids to inference cannot be completely accounted for with reference to the morphology

of the language alone. Semantic considerations such as animacy have allowed us to identify skewings in speakers' use of the morphology of their language for signalling participant roles in events (see section 3.0). Similarly, we have seen that such considerations come into play in the interpretation of relations between participants in particular syntactic configurations, here the case being the constructions NOUN -A NOUN (see section 6.0). These observations show that any study of syntactic patterns in language cannot be fully investigated without recourse to considerations of meaning. Particular syntactic configurations signal information about the items which are in construction; similarly, features of those items themselves determine, in part, the precise message about the relations expressed by the syntactic configuration which is being expressed. We suggest that there are two strategies which speakers use in order to communicate and understand one anothers messages: I. Direct--Information which is signalled specifically by the morphology of the language; II. Indirect--Information which is inferred according to semantic considerations of the participants involved in an event (eg. inherent features or characteristics), as well as with reference to conventional associations about the kinds of roles which particular things in the world are more likely to have in events and the kinds of relations they are more likely to have with one another. Factors such as the appeal to pragmatic context for message interpretation will also fall under this strategy for communicating meassages. Since we know that people communicate mutually intelligble messages to one another in a non-random fashion, and that they do this with a finite set of linguistic elements (the morphology of a language), our initial task is one of identifying the meaningful function of these elements in communication. Then we can begin to systematically examine less direct strategies for conveying messages.

7.2 In conclusion we might constrast this approach to

an analysis in the generative framework currently used in many linguistic studies. Presumably, such an analysis would derive the different uses of -A from variant underlying structures and, in this way, differences in 'meaning' for a single surface construct would be accounted for. Through this approach, semantic ambiguity for the syntactic configuration $NOUN_1$ --A $NOUN_2$ would become apparent. The orientation would not, however, explain why this ambiguity does not cause problems in actual communication. The concern would be to account for the superficial unitary structure of the relations expressed by -A, not to examine differeneces in the semantic import of those relations. It is a premise of the present discussion that a unitary syntactic phenomena should not be evidence to postulate a semantic ambiguity which is in fact not problemmatic in speaker's actual usage of that construct. Such an hypothesis does not further our understanding of how the device is used in communication. Our interest is, then, that we determine what aspects of its occurrence can account for how it is used by speakers to convey the messages that it does. In our discussion we have noted that certain linguistic elements may be used to convey multiple sets of communicated messages. By examining how this is done with reference to differences in linguistic context we are able to propose how a finite set of linguistic elements might be used to convey an infinite variety of messages. This fact about language has been a major impetus behind all generative approaches. We have also seen in our query that the communicative potential of any linguistic code cannot be fully understood without reference to information which is not specifically signalled by the morphological elements of that code. When speakers and hearers conversationally interact they assume that something meaningful is to be expressed. Therefore they will use whatever strategies they have available to them in order to 'figure out' what is being communicated. By examining syntactically singular constructs with reference to the different messages which they may convey we are able to begin to identify what these communicative strategies for

constructing and interpreting utterances are. Only then can we begin to understand what is, in fact, the linguistic 'structure' of language.

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